

India Re-Doubles Efforts to Save the Ozone Layer

Delhi, 2 May 2002 - Under the initiative the four big manufacturers of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), chemicals used in fridges, air conditioning units and aerosols which have been found to damage the Earth's protective shield, are pledging to crack down on "rogue emissions" by introducing new, cleaner, production technologies.

They are also backing a nationwide public awareness scheme. It will be targeted at the thousand of small and medium sized companies that are part of the CFC supply chain and include fridge makers and repairers, suppliers of air conditioning units, and users of products that contain the ozone-depleting chemicals.

Klaus Toepfer, the Executive Director of UNEP, said at the launch event in New Delhi: "India, as the world's second biggest manufacturer of CFCs after China, has already made great strides in reducing and phasing out these damaging substances whose production and consumption harm the stratospheric ozone layer, the Earth's shield which filters out harmful levels of the sun's ultra violet light".

In 1999 India was granted US\$ 82 million to assist in the phase out of the chemicals under the terms of the Montreal Protocol, the international treaty drawn up to cut the levels of ozone-depleting substances entering the upper atmosphere.

Production by the four companies concerned is scheduled to reach zero in 2010 from a peak production figure of 23,659 tonnes at the end of the 1990s.

"The commitments made today go even further. During the manufacture of CFCs, some of these chemicals are emitted to the environment. These 'rogue' emissions are not accounted for in the targets and timetables of the current phase out plan. Other pollutants, some of which may be ozone damaging and others which might have impacts on local air quality or global warming, can also be released. The new initiative seeks to reduce these through companies voluntarily adopting cleaner production processes. I applaud India's move," added Mr Toepfer.

Raising awareness among the complicated chain of suppliers and users will also go a long way towards reducing India's releases of CFCs. It will also help prepare these companies and organizations for the final phase out of the chemicals in eight years time, encouraging them to switch to more ozone-friendly alternatives.

UNEP's Energy and OzonAction branch also hope India's voluntary pledge initiative will spur on other developing countries to adopt similar, ozone friendly, schemes.

UNEP hopes the new, public awareness, exercise will also help in combating the smuggling of CFCs across South and Southeast Asia. CFCs can retail for around US\$4 a kilogramme in developing countries. But the international retail market in the region is between US\$ 1 and US\$ 1.5 kilogrammes. The police, Interpol and monitoring organizations have evidence that some countries outside India are profiting from the price difference by selling back the CFCs to the Indian market illegally. Experts are concerned that the trade may be reducing the country's efforts to reduce consumption of these ozone-damaging chemicals.

Notes to Editors: The new initiative is being supported by UNEP's Energy and OzonAction branch and Cleaner Production Unit based in Paris, France, and India's National Cleaner Production Centre. The four companies concerned are Chemplast Sanmar, Gujarat Fluorochemicals, Mafatlal Industries and SRF Ltd. In 1998 they accounted for 16 per cent of the world production of CFCs, after China which had a 35 per cent share of the world market.

Under the Montreal Protocol, developed countries have already phased out CFCs. Developing countries like India have been given assistance and set timetables and targets for similar phase outs.

For More Information Please Contact: Nick Nuttall, UNEP Head of Media, on Mobile: 1 917 498 7532